

## Women in education

### CO-COMPILER'S COMMENTS

What does it mean to us and to the world that women are involved in education? What is our special obligation? It may be regarded as a given, but no less forceful, that these writers feel a call to make a difference in the lives of others. We strive to let the Holy Spirit permeate our encounters with students, parents, and coworkers. Teachers who appreciate the influence they can have will no doubt experience the trials and rewards of striving after the greatest teacher of them all. The popular culture in which we work makes stiff competition for communicating many Christian values, but the culture of many educational institutions makes stiff resistance for egalitarian change. Controversy is not generally welcome, but is bound to occur where critical thinkers are active.

As a Christian female educator, I ponder both the micro- and macro-needs of students and their families. Then, like a billboard in the distance, I see in my mind's eye the letters "WWJD," and I begin debating with myself. Would Jesus attend only to the micro needs of the one individual before him, or would he be equally involved in the macro; working to dismantle the structural inequalities around him? How we privately answer the question of "What Would Jesus Do" (WWJD) must inform our approach to teaching.

As Christians, we need to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and sometimes we feel overwhelmed by the needs of the students

and families under pressure in our society. In my work as a high school independent studies teacher, I work with many teens who don't fit in or can't keep up with the traditional classroom. The most at-risk ones—those pending expulsion—go through our program. For example, students who need intervention early in order to read at grade level go through this program. It is also important to note that their parents also need support; a paucity of role models means many teen mothers can't see a more rewarding future. These systemic problems make it hard to know what to tackle first. Of course, a sincere attitude of Jesus' love and affirmation can be the most valuable contribution when my influence over larger issues is ineffective.

Each Christian woman charged with teaching has an awesome responsibility. The contributors to this *Women's Concerns Report* are certainly not in this work only for a paycheck. Many gifted women work in education as volunteers, and for them as well, the demands of teaching must be weighed against the demands of their personal lives. When we enjoy the challenge of our work, we could let it take 100% of our time.

Some observations about education that I take from these articles and my own work are described below. One of the great mysteries of education borne out by these women's stories is that as we try to help our students grow and change, they

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**Teachers who appreciate the influence they can have will no doubt experience the trials and rewards of striving after the greatest teacher of them all.**

Maureen Neault lives in Upland, California, attends Solid Ground Brethren in Christ Church in Alta Loma, California, and works for Chaffey High School in Ontario, California. She is married to Bob Verseput, and she cares for a son, a daughter, and a Cocker Spaniel. She has served one year as a member of the MCC U.S. Committee on Women's Concerns. The next big thing in her life will be to student teach and get her teaching credentials! Reading, camping, dancing, and sleeping are favorite activities.

bring about growth and change in us. We are challenged to help children and young adults see a new, improved future. We want to produce a non-sexist, non-racist society, so we have to behave as if it's here; this work can definitely take us outside our comfort zone and can be exhausting at times. Our churches need change as much, if not more, than our secular society. That may be the most difficult setting of all for many women, who otherwise speak with authority at their jobs, to step up. Praise God for women doing theology!

The Holy Spirit is the matchless change agent. First of all, changing from selfish to servant is a daily struggle. In addition, we are challenged to try new ways of teaching a familiar subject and new ways of seeing a stereotypical face. Our students are not just those blank slates of old educational theory, but they bring baggage with them to class every day. When I think about what's behind the poor performance of

many young students, I know that radical change is needed to break a discouraging cycle. In my personal theology, the Holy Spirit says, "Educate everyone, but especially the girls and women, that anything you can dream, you can do. Then go and make it so." That means shaking up the status quo, something for which I am not well socialized. I trust, though, that relinquishment of power has often been the Holy Spirit's intent for societal institutions over the centuries; those who were made to share wealth and power never liked it, but as I look back, I'm convinced it was Jesus' work. This builds my faith and hope in future change, knowing that women such as these writers are committed to expanding the boundaries. From children's Bible Study Fellowship to university theology, women teachers are role models. A certain self-consciousness contributes to the stature of our work; we know our contribution is valuable.

—co-compiled by Maureen Neault

## FROM THE editor

**C**hristianity and education; are these topics even related? The teachers and administrators at our church colleges and K-12 institutions would say yes; and most of the writers in this issue of *Women's Concerns Report* say yes as

well. However, there are some people in the church who would say no, and are very opposed to the idea of mixing Christianity and education, especially in public education.

Regardless of what you may think on this topic, the Bible does have some things to say about education. There are many examples of God calling people to teach the rest of us how to live justly and correctly. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses is sent to teach Israel how to live so that "your children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God . . . that your days may be long . . . and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey."

Of course, the most well known teacher sent from God is Jesus. Numerous times in the New Testament (and in our children's Bible stories, Sunday school lessons, and songs we sing), Jesus is referred to as a teacher. And people recognized that Jesus was a gifted teacher from God. In Mark 1:27, the observers in the synagogue say "What is this? A new teaching—with

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authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." The people saw that Jesus taught and acted for the benefit of the people.

There are also examples of people calling upon God to teach them. In Psalms 90, Moses prays to God to "teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart." In Psalms 119, the unknown psalter asks God to "teach me good judgement and knowledge" (verse 66).

A person also gets a sense of the value of teaching from the Bible. In I Corinthians 12:28, Paul ranks the different gifts that people may have. First, it is the gift to be an apostle; second, it is the gift to be a prophet; and third, it is the gift to be a teacher. In Ephesians 4:11, teaching

is named as a gift given by God. And, finally, in James 3:1, the writer states that not many people become teachers because teachers are held to higher standards than other people. This higher standard implies an importance of the work of teaching.

The Bible verses mentioned here, and the stories told in this issue, demonstrate the wide diversity of what is even considered teaching. The women telling these stories in this issue of *Report* share openly and honestly regarding their experiences teaching others. Their love for their work, and their commitment to teaching is an inspiration. I hope you enjoy these stories of teaching—a gift that is truly from and of God.

—Patricia J. Haverstick

## Women in preschool education

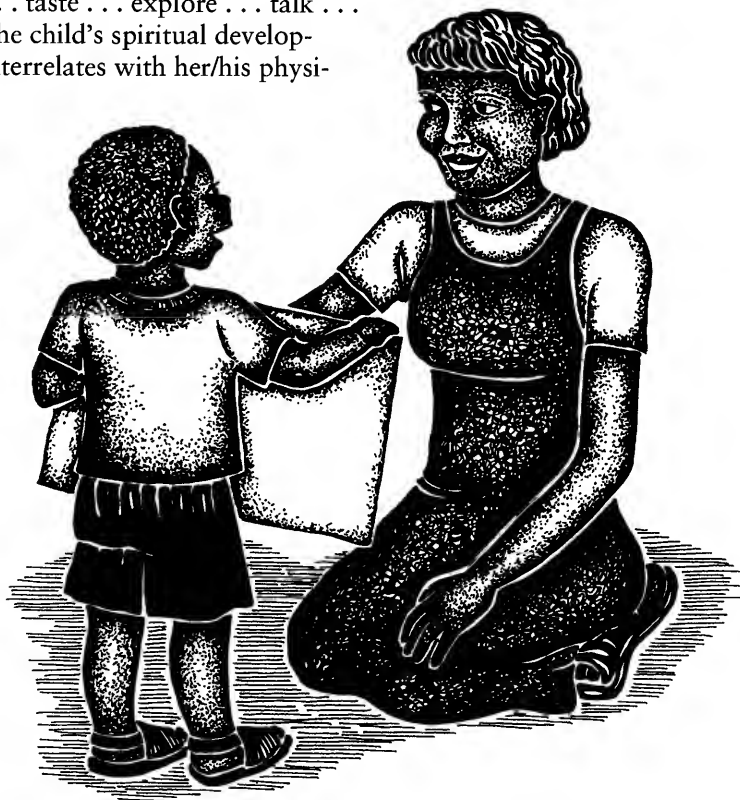
**P**reschool teachers are often regarded with less esteem and almost always receive less pay than other teachers. Furthermore, preschool teaching, whether in Sunday school or in a weekday Christian center, is often an unrecognized and underappreciated ministry of the church. I have been in childhood education (preschool through junior high) for over 50 years. My most recent experience has been on the preschool level as both a teacher and administrator. From what I have observed and experienced through the years, I believe that preschool teachers often have more influence than teachers at other levels. Preschool education provides experiences that stimulate curiosity and inspire a lifelong desire to learn. It is important that children be given that lifelong desire to learn about spiritual things. In this article, I want to look at preschool education as a ministry of the church.

### Privilege of ministry: Promoting growth

A child undergoes 50% of her/his general learning ability prior to age six. What better time to influence a child's life? A child learns more in her/his preschool years than in four years of high school.

The spiritual aspect of the young child's growth cannot be separated from the total growth process. The child needs to: listen . . . look . . . touch . . . move . . . smell . . . taste . . . explore . . . talk . . . play. The child's spiritual development interrelates with her/his physi-

by Lillian Miller



Lillian Miller lives in Rancho Cucamonga, California. She has been involved in Christian education in the church as either a teacher or as Christian Education Director for over 50 years. Currently, she is the chairperson of the Nurture/Evangelism Task Force at Mountain View Mennonite Church. Formerly, she was involved at Bethesda Mennonite Church in St. Louis, Missouri. She has spent 20 years in elementary education, and the last 20 years in Christian preschool education; she retired on January 1, 2004. She and her husband have two children and four granddaughters.

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cal, mental, social, and emotional development. The child is more curious, asks more questions and is more receptive to the answers than at any other period of life.

Working with preschool parents is also a ministry and privilege. In addition to showing parents the love of Christ in daily interactions, most preschool parents attend their children's programs. The preschool must make certain that the programs reflect the gospel of Christ. A preschool program needs to directly confront families with a personal invitation to Christ.

#### **Nature of ministry: Service**

Preschool teaching is a service: to the child who deserves Christ-like care; to single and low-income parents who need assistance dealing with the daily pressures of life; to depressed or overwhelmed mothers who are emotionally "away" even when physically present; and to overworked parents who have little time left for teaching values to their children. In all of these family situations, intervention at a preschool level has been shown to minimize the likelihood of failure at a later time in life.

#### **Purpose of ministry: To glorify God**

If teaching preschool is indeed a ministry, everything the teacher does on a daily basis must honor and glorify God. The teacher must evaluate her/his time in the classroom. Is God honored and glorified in the teacher's interaction with children?

#### **Tools of ministry: Prayer and Bible reading**

The greatest tool preschool staff have is praying regularly for each student. Do we pray for our students daily and do we pray that our actions will help preschoolers see Christ through us? Do we fortify our own Christian lives with Bible study so that the love of Jesus shows through us? Prayer and Bible study are even more important to a teacher's daily preparation than designing the lesson plans to be taught.

#### **Power of ministry: The Holy Spirit**

Effective preschool teachers constantly ask for the Holy Spirit's direction in their teaching. Guidance is often needed when dealing with a child who is causing a discipline problem; when answering yet another child's difficult question; when patience begins to grow thin; or when talking to parents about a child's behavior. It is also important that teachers pray for insight to recognize opportunities for teaching spiritual concepts. Sometimes well developed plans/curriculum must be put aside to take advantage of the "teachable moments" that the Holy Spirit unexpectedly places before us; like a first snowfall, new plants, a bird or a child showing up with a broken leg.

#### **Model of ministry: Christ's love**

Preschool educators must model Christ, who demonstrated his love to others. Likewise, a Christian expresses God's love by loving others. The younger the child, the more dependent she/he is on experiences rather than words to learn about God's love. Recognizing the love of a teacher does more to help a child understand the vastness of God's love than any amount of Bible stories or "words."

Love, concern, and patience must also be demonstrated with parents. Parenthood calls for more than simply "instinct." It requires constant growth in nurturing, caring, protecting, and stimulating children to grow and develop to the limits of their potential. We must patiently help parents understand their role in the child's development.

God, through Christ, has loved us and called each of us to ministry. Children experience this when they feel the loving care of parents and preschool teachers. Children achieve dignity and self-respect only with positive images of themselves. Whether or not others recognize the high calling of the preschool teacher, she has the opportunity to impact a child's responsiveness to learning and spiritual values for the rest of the child's life. ♦

# Modeling gender equality

by Mary Friesen

Mary Friesen lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and is married to Gerhard; they have two married children and four grandchildren. Mary is a member of River East Mennonite Brethren Church. Mary is the Coordinator of Programs with Low German Mennonites in the Americas with MCC Canada. She graduated with a Doctor of Ministry (Education) in 2003; has taught at the University of Winnipeg from 2001–2003; and was a teacher and vice principal at a Mennonite secondary school from 1988–2000.

**If we want to see equality between men and women in education, we need to model it in our schools. How children are socialized today determines the destiny of our churches and of society.**

**I**t was a nice afternoon and I was on my way to a meeting with two parents of students from our Mennonite secondary school. They had asked to meet with the biblical studies' teacher and one administrator. When the parents saw my male colleague and me enter the building, they came and greeted us. They already knew my colleague, who then introduced me as Mary Friesen. When I suggested that we should probably start the meeting, one of the parents replied, "Well, the principal said he would send one of the vice principals as well. We should probably wait until he gets here." I simply replied, "Yes, I am the vice principal." This happened ten years ago, shortly after I had been appointed to this administrative position. For this Mennonite secondary school, it was the very first time a woman had been a member of the administration in their almost 50-year history.

Although women in administrative positions in secondary schools are no longer considered an oddity, the number of women in these roles in Mennonite elementary and secondary schools have hardly increased in the last ten years. A quick survey of the Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools (grades K–12) administrators for 2003–04 shows that of the 27 principals and vice principals listed, only four are female. Women make up most of the office support staff personnel, while men still dominate the upper administrative positions. I find this gap between men and women disturbing. Based on my seven years' experience as vice principal in a Mennonite secondary school, I am convinced that there are numerous levels of influence female administrators have on the education of students.

In my first year as a member of the administrative team, I responded to a disturbance in the school parking lot. I informed the students that they were disturbing the neighborhood with their behavior and loud music. When I asked them to turn down the music and go back inside, one of the male senior high students said: "Well, now, Mrs. Friesen, you don't really expect us to do that, do you?" Yes, I did.

Another student commented, "So what are you going to do if we don't?" I knew instinctively that these students would not have said that to a male administrator. I experienced similar reactions from students on numerous occasions in the first few years as vice principal, but not after the third year. By that time, when students came into high school, they were introduced to a team of one female and two male administrators, and they learned to accept me as an equal to the male vice principal. This points to the need for role models in education when it comes to gender equality. Children develop biases based on their experiences. If we want to see equality between men and women in education, we need to model it in our schools. How children are socialized today determines the destiny of our churches and of society.

While I was teaching biblical studies at the high school, I continued studies toward a Master of Divinity degree and graduated just before I was appointed as vice principal. When our school choir did deputations in churches, one of the administrators would usually lead the worship service and another colleague would preach. I remember when we in the administration had to deal with the request of a few students who wanted to be excused from the choir on a specific Sunday because "Mrs. Friesen will be preaching." Some students did not want to participate in an event where a woman would be preaching. Thus far their experience had been that only men are called to pulpit ministry. I believe the practice we



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had that administrators each took turns in chairing meetings, and in leading public concerts, chapels or school programs helped students and parents to accept me as an equal within the administration team. In time, parents would comment that they appreciated the unique perspective I brought to issues and discussions and my participation in public events.

In my experience as a team member of the administration, I was able to balance or broaden the educational perspective in our decision-making processes. This was especially evident when we addressed issues of sexual discrimination within the system or discussed our sexual harassment policy. As three administrators, we once discussed a discipline issue that in my opinion had to do with sexual harassment, but my male colleagues were not so sure. I asked them the question, "If this was your daughter, what would you want the school administration to do?" Quite frequently, this practical question alerted us to some dimension of students' lives that we would otherwise have ignored. I'm speaking here of a difference in the way men and women may think about situations or relationships. We all make better decisions when we have opportunity for diverse perspectives, and gender balance is certainly a major factor.

On more than one occasion, a high school girl came into my office and asked to talk to me about some "female" issues. They would often start the conversation like this, "I know I should talk to Mr. W. about this, but this is not something I can tell a man." Adolescent girls need to be

able to discuss personal issues that impact their academic performance or attendance with a female administrator. In the seven years as vice principal, I have often gone to my male colleagues in administration to explain the situation of a female student and asked that an exception to policy be made. I firmly believe that we owe it to our young daughters to have women in roles of leadership where they have opportunity and authority to influence the education of the children in our schools.

Experience has shown that we make better decisions when we have diverse perspectives represented on boards, committees and administrations. It is not enough for school boards to have a policy statement about equal opportunities for all unless it is supported by a clear and explicit implementation plan. It would appear that our Mennonite educational institutions have a long way to go before we can speak about equal opportunity for women in administrative positions. Wilson and Byrne\* point to the evidence of the importance of women in leadership positions as role models. In their study many women commented on the lack of women in visible leadership roles and expressed concern about the effects on the motivations and aspirations of young female students. It is worth noting that the availability of role models for women is important, not because they need them more than men, but because men already have them. ♦

\* Wilson, Brian and Eileen Byrne (eds.), *Women in the University: A Policy Report* (A Report of the University of Queensland Senate Working Party on the Status of Women). St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1987. Pg. 63-65.

# Making a difference for kids

## One learning disability at a time

by Carol Rewers

**I**'ll admit it; when I came out of college, I had grand ideas that I would be the one to make systematic changes in the social services system. I planned on getting my master's degree in social work and then serve the public by making the Department of Social Services a better place.

God had a different plan for me. Instead of finding a social work job (not enough experience), I took my first job teaching. Not just teaching, mind you, but teaching gang kids in Los Angeles with learning disabilities that have been kicked out of the public school system because of drugs or violence violations.



No problem. Or, at least that's what I wanted them to think. Every day I was confronted with abuse, aggression and a despair of a population that I had little or no previous contact with. They came to school hungry or high. They got arrested for graffiti. They had no support for their education at home. Yet, they came.

Letting them "in" to my life and heart was easy. Reconciling what that meant for my future was harder. They truly changed my life! All along that journey God was speaking to me through these kids. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

Twelve years later, I am still teaching. A different classroom, a different district, and different kids, but in many ways my elementary school kids with learning disabilities have the same "face" that the 16- to 18-year-olds had. They have the same fears, the same despair and the same doubts about their place in a school (society) where they can't yet read, write a good sentence or paragraph or add the money in their pocket. They come to school hungry, having not had any breakfast. They push and test and challenge in

order to see how much they can trust me. They succeed and fail, looking for approval and love all the while.

I know I can't change the world. But, providing a safe, energetic and welcoming environment for my 25 kids each year is changing something—THEM.

I thank God that I have found my place. I feel that the gifts God has given me are being used to bring safety, peace, self-confidence and love to a few kids with really hard lives. What a better way to save the world! ♦

Carol Rewers is a 33-year-old teacher, mother, photographer, gardener, friend, and chocolate lover who lives in Monrovia, California. She and her family attend Pasadena Mennonite Church with many other "fine Mennonite converts and transplants." She has been teaching kids with learning disabilities for 10 years, and still loves it.

**Letting them "in" to my life and heart was easy. Reconciling what that meant for my future was the harder part. They truly changed my life!**



## Praising God through dance

**D**id you know that dance is a form of praise and worship to the Lord? If you answered no or even if you don't know the answer to the question, don't feel bad. I too was among those who would have been unsure of the answer if the question had been posed to me several years ago. "Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise in the congregation of saints . . . Let them praise His name in the dance: let them sing praises unto Him with the Timbrel and harp" (Psalm 149:1,3).

I would like to share with you briefly what God has taught me through dance in the ministry. When using dance while during worship, one can receive the word of the Lord. The anointing can be imparted to

heal, encourage, exhort, direct and correct through dance. God can also reveal His mind and will during this time. Our God is not one to be boxed in; there is no limit to what He can do if we allow Him to have free reign in our lives. This may require one to come out of the comfort zone though. How do I know? I know because this is what He has done for me. God took something that I had a passion for and used it to bring about deliverance in the lives of His people. He will use the skilled as well as the unskilled for His purposes.

In the New Testament, the people were absolutely amazed at the teaching of the disciples after the death of Jesus. Although many of them had no formal education, they were able to preach, teach, heal and

**by Valerie J. Jones**

Valerie Jones resides in Hampton, Virginia, and was born and raised in Monessen, Pennsylvania. She has two sons, one daughter and one granddaughter, and is employed by the Virginia Employment Commission in Norfolk, Virginia. Valerie also works part-time for CBN/700 Club as a Prayer Counselor in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Valerie is the Movement Ministry Leader at Calvary Community Church in Hampton, Virginia. She also sings in the Mass Choir and works with the Phone Ministry.

**God took something that I had a passion for and used it to bring about deliverance in the lives of His people. He will use the skilled as well as the unskilled for His purposes.**



**What I discovered was that dancing unto the Lord during worship allowed me to be healed and delivered, but I never gave any thought to how God would utilize this gift through me to set others free as well.**

deliver because of the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon their lives. The same anointing has allowed me, a worshiper with no formal training, to minister through dance and movement.

I have been involved in the Dance Ministry at Calvary Community Church in Hampton, Virginia, for many years now. Initially, I had no desire to be in any dance ministry. I was quite comfortable dancing in the pew. I had always loved to dance and that passion remained with me in church. Every Sunday I would go to church with the intent of not dancing during the praise and worship time. I would talk to myself as I would dress, drive to church, and listen to the announcements. But, just about every Sunday, as I allowed the music to minister to me, I found myself being led into the presence of the Lord. I felt as though I was touching the heart of God through dance. There is nothing like dancing into the anointing. If I were to take my happiest and greatest moments collectively and multiply them by a million, I still would not be able to come close to describing this experience.

The more I yielded my will to God, the more He was able to do for me and through me. I was asked to become a part of the praise and worship dance team of the Movement Ministry at my church. My first reaction was “No, I can’t do that.” I heard the word of the Lord respond to my heart, “That’s right—not you but me.” All I could say in return was “Not my will Lord, but Thy will be done.” So off I went in territory that was totally unfamiliar to me. I did not really know that dance was a form of praise and worship then. What I discovered was that dancing unto the Lord during worship allowed me to be healed and delivered, but I never gave any thought to how God would utilize this gift through me to set others free as well. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).

During the earlier days of my praise and worship dance, I was more concerned about hair, make-up and clothes, all of which had to look good. All steps and moves had to be choreographed just right. After all, I was out front for all the congregation to see, and I wanted to make sure that I did everything perfectly. Certainly God wants us to look our best, as we are His finest representation of His manifested purpose on earth; however, God’s work is not about you or me. In the words of a song, we must learn to “Forget about ourselves, concentrate on Him and worship Christ our Lord.”

By faith I learned that where the presence of the Lord is, there is liberty and fullness of joy. Power for healing, deliverance, cleansing and provision for every need are met through praise and worship. Through experience and God’s leading, I emphasize that appearance is not the most important thing. I try to share this with the others in the Movement Ministry. When we get to this level in our praise to God, we won’t care about how we look or the impression we will make in front of people. He will take us to places during praise and worship that are inconceivable with our natural mind. What liberty is released! Even David in the Old Testament “danced before the Lord with all his might” (2 Samuel 6:14) when the Ark of the Covenant was brought up to Jerusalem from the house of Obed-Edom. He whom the Son sets free is free indeed . . . free of sickness, poverty, disease, disorder and confusion. Jesus came to set us free!

Currently I am a very happy servant of the Lord at Calvary Community Church. As Movement Ministry Leader, I have had the opportunity to teach and learn with the other dancers. The Movement Ministry is choreographed dance, mime, sign language and praise and worship accompaniment through movement. Though what we do is entertaining, our mission is to minister. Our purpose is to allow the love and power of Christ to show through us in our movements. Our job is to do battle and spiritual warfare in dance. “God is a Spirit, and his worshipers must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). ♦



# Teaching from the other side

**F**our years ago, I started teaching sociology part-time at several local colleges. I am finishing up my Ph.D. in sociology, and like every struggling graduate student, I've had to make ends meet by teaching in order to gain that all-important classroom experience. I've spent the past seven years in graduate studies, moving from field to field, looking for that one subject that I would feel passionate about enough to teach it for years to come. During that time, I've sat through endless discussions on education and pedagogy. However, when I stood in front of my first class of thirty 19- and 20-years-olds, palms sweating, barely able to remember my name; the pedagogy went out the window. I had to figure out how to teach this group sitting in front of me, some of whom were older than I at the time.

I've spent most of my graduate career researching women, children, and poverty. As a young professor, I've also asked myself how I can be an effective teacher, and what it is that I truly want to impart to my students. I have realized, though, that I'm learning just as much as they are in the classroom, much of the time on topics that bear no relationship to what we might be discussing.

My biggest concern is to learn how to teach about social justice, and therein lies the part of my faith that I try to integrate into my work as an educator. Many of my professors discussed education as neutral territory—you don't want your students to see your biases, you should let them figure things out on their own. After all, isn't education about a thirst for knowledge and discovery that can't happen if you are telling people what to think?

Neutrality in the classroom is such a disservice to one's students. Take, for example, trying to teach inequality and racism to a classroom full of middle and upper income white students. My experience has been that too many students are convinced that their social location is due to hard work, that racism does not exist anymore, and that the poor are lazy. Who benefits by not challenging these stereotypes and misinfor-

mation? As a social scientist, I can present numerous articles and evidence stating the contrary; shouldn't I at least help them to challenge their beliefs somewhat?

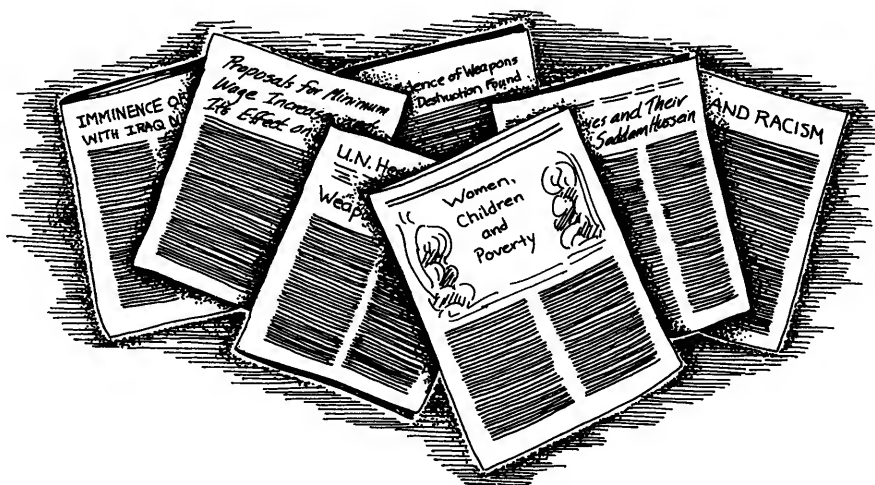
One of my most recent memories of the dance that teachers perform between letting students find their own way while at the same time helping them to interrogate the dominant culture's understanding of the world, occurred during the build up to the war in Iraq last year. I was teaching at a small, evangelical Christian liberal arts college in the Midwest. Most of the students were middle income white students, although the admissions center had done a lot to recruit students from the very diverse urban neighborhood in which the school was located.

As the build up to the war took place, I was teaching a class on the social construction of knowledge and the mass media. What a perfect opportunity to investigate the use of power, control, and language to frame the justification for a war! For our class discussions and readings, I pulled transcripts of U.N. hearings and documents of weapons inspectors saying that there were not likely weapons of mass destruction. I presented historical documents showing the link between the United States, the CIA, and Saddam Hussein in the 1980s. I wanted to give students information and evidence from other groups and experts that interrogated the need for war, but whose voices were

by Rebecca Burwell

Rebecca Burwell lives in Chicago, Illinois, and is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for the Study of Latino Religion at the University of Notre Dame. She recently completed her Ph.D. in sociology at Loyola University Chicago and is looking forward to reading, journaling, and dancing now that her dissertation is complete. She is a member of Grantham Brethren in Christ Church, Grantham, Pennsylvania, and currently worships at the St. Gertrude's Gym Mass in Chicago and is planning a Fall 2004 wedding to Chirag Mehta.

**My biggest concern is to learn how to teach about social justice, and therein lies the part of my faith that I try to integrate into my work as an educator.**



**My experience has been that too many students are convinced that their social location is due to hard work, that racism does not exist anymore, and that the poor are lazy. Who benefits by not challenging these stereotypes and misinformation? As a social scientist, I can present numerous articles and evidence stating the contrary.**

all but silenced in the debate. I asked my students to consider why we hadn't seen these voices on the front pages of our newspapers or on the nightly news. I wanted to challenge students to think critically about which nations really had weapons of mass destruction and who actually used those weapons with regularity. But, they weren't convinced, or should I say—they wouldn't consider other ideas or scenarios. War was the only option.

For me, the humbling moment in that classroom came when the lone Muslim student, outnumbered by religion and by race, raised his hand and said that he believed that the war was about oil and United States' imperialism. He said that the United States wouldn't find weapons of mass destruction because they did not exist. Iraq was too poor to have them. And, furthermore, if you wanted to talk about installing a democratically elected president, shouldn't the United States be concerned that it's own president was installed by the Supreme Court after another nominee actually won the election through popular votes? Isn't that anti-democratic?

Silence. No agreement by the others and then the bell rang.

But, I remember that student because he was brave. He knew his classmates' biases, but he spoke the truth as he saw it,

unafraid of the popular consensus. I wish I did that more often.

So, I remember him when I feel outnumbered during a conversation or when my students stare blankly when I suggest that we should consider raising the minimum wage so that people wouldn't have to use welfare or so that low-income families could obtain economic security. He taught me, the teacher, to "teach from the other side;" that is, to teach from the side of those who have no voice, whether it is children in Iraq or women on welfare. I have a responsibility to talk about the experiences of those who don't have power or who have been silenced. Isn't that what Christ did? He taught from the other side, when he cavorted with lepers, prostitutes, and tax collectors. He validated them as people—their lives had meaning, and the prevailing stereotypes about them did not scratch the surface of who they were and why they found themselves in their respective situations. Jesus said that the poor woman with a few gold coins had much to teach us. And, he did it in the face of the elite who believed that their way of thinking and doing was the right way. My young student did the same, challenging his colleagues' deeply entrenched ideas about violence and power and reminded me of what Christ said when he stated that what you have done for the "least of these" you have also done for him. ♦

## The classroom; a mission

by Joan Graff Clucas

Joan Graff Clucas is a retired public school teacher in Southern California. She still substitutes in the district in which she taught for 28 years. Her husband Don and she have three adult children. They attend the Solid Ground Brethren in Christ Church in Alta Loma where they co-chair the missions committee. Joan is a deacon, sings in the choir, plays in the bell choir, and was the former head of Women's Ministries at Solid Ground. Joan is also on the alumni board of Biola University. Joan wrote *Mother Teresa, a Biography*.

**A**s a teenager in the Grace Brethren Church in Inglewood, California, I felt God's leading through the Sisterhood of Mary and Martha to become involved in missions. Sisterhood was a highlight of my month, an evening when only the girls gathered at our sponsor's home to learn about Grace Brethren missionaries and pray for them. We also recycled old sheets by tearing them into two inch wide strips and rolling them for use as bandages in foreign countries. Another aspect of our time together was writing letters to missionaries. My assigned missionary was Miss Marie Missler in Africa, and I came to know her through her letters back to

me. During these years, we had several missionary speakers come to our church. Their messages and slide shows convinced me to prepare for missionary service somewhere—probably Africa—like Miss Missler.

After high school, in 1959, there was only one school for me, Biola College (The Bible Institute of Los Angeles). With general education classes, Bible, psychology, and field hockey crowding my morning hours, I still had time to take a bus into Los Angeles and work four hours downtown each afternoon. Four more semesters were busy with different classes and two job changes, but I

kept my eyes on the news from mission fields that as many speakers who came to our chapel meetings said, "Were ripe already to harvest" (John 4:35).

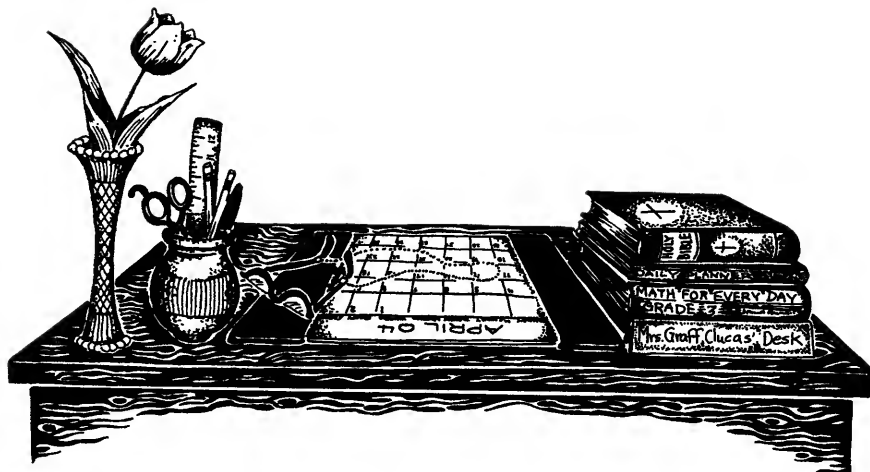
Then it was time to declare a major. It seemed to me that children were the biggest mission field of all—especially in a public school where many of them had no spiritual guidance in their homes—so I went into education, planning to use my training in whatever way God would reveal to me.

I graduated with my bachelor's degree, and was given my first class of wonderful third-graders in La Mirada, California. Taking the Gospel to people in foreign lands still was important, but my influence on young children through my position as their teacher became very real and satisfying.

There has been a great misconception in the minds of many, teachers and parents alike, that because of our country's position on separation of church and state, that teachers are not allowed to share their faith in the public school classroom, that teaching about religious holidays is off-limits, and that the Bible has no place. This is far from the truth. I kept a Bible either on my desk or in the nearest bookshelf at all times.

My classroom always had an atmosphere of loving acceptance, kindness, fair discipline, and behavior rules based on the Bible. Everywhere I turned, there were opportunities to use scripture. Many verses were easily recognized as classroom rules even though I stated them in words they understood. For example: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them" (Luke 6:31); "Be ye kind one to another" (Ephesians 4:32); "There are last who shall be first, and there are first who shall be last" (Luke 13:30); "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1); and "Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15).

Early in the year, the children learned about my favorite book, the Bible, because I would tell them a story from it, and ask who knew where that story was found. There was always at least one little Christian in each classroom who was eager to tell. For example, Abraham Lincoln was named after another famous Abraham. Does anyone know another Abraham?



At Christmas during my first or second year in Alta Loma, a student gave me a small, cardboard nativity scene. I allowed her to tell the class about it and find out if any of the other children wanted to add anything. Even I was amazed at the theology we discussed while never crossing that fine line of coercion or preaching. At Easter, we would discuss bunnies and chicks, and I'd talk about new life in an egg. With just the slightest direction of asking if anyone knew what Easter was really all about, the church children would tell everything they knew about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, while the other children would listen carefully. Although I never actually led a child to faith in Christ, many seeds of faith in him were sown into little hearts during my years in the public school. We also studied Hanukkah, Passover, Kwanza, Ramadan, and other religious holidays.

Another opportunity for "mission work" came during parent/teacher conferences. One of the aspects of teaching which I always found troublesome was grading children. It would have been so lovely to just have a good time each day, teaching and learning, without all that accountability! However, since "my favorite book" teaches that "all things should be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40), I have always kept careful grade books, constantly requiring the children to turn in their finished work, grading it, and recording either letter grades or percentages. When conferences came around, it was easier to show parents how their child earned the grades.

Sometimes, in the case of a child who was reticent to do his or her best, sharing the grades that child had earned would bring dismay to the parents at the conference table. Emotions would come tumbling

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out, and since for many of the last years of my career the parents were much younger than I, they would ask for advice—not just for their child's grades, but about other areas of life. Without hesitation, I would direct them to God's word, sharing my own testimony of how God's grace helped me through the struggles in my life.

My life was not spent across the ocean in another country far from home, but each day as I walked into the classroom, I gave the day with all its challenges, problems, and joys to the God who loves me and trusted Him to work through me to bring children closer to Him. ♦

# The growing of a student and a teacher

by Sandra Ahgbashian

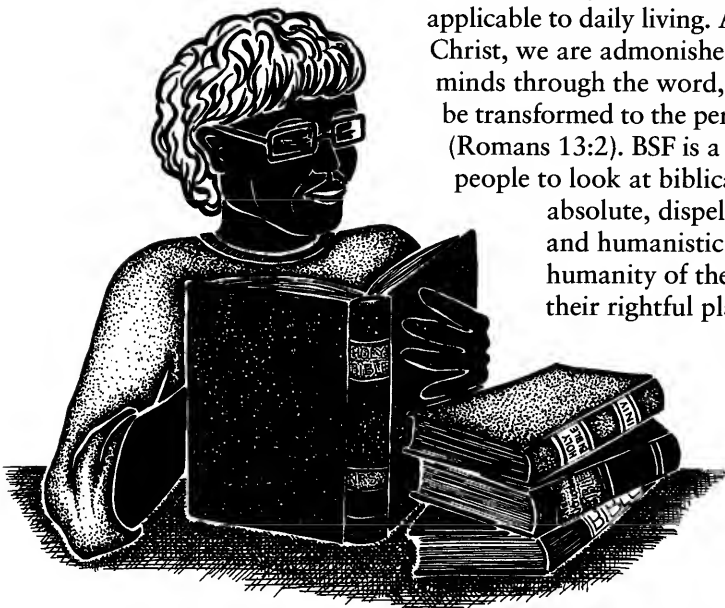
Sandra Ahgbashian attends Solid Ground Brethren in Christ church, in Alta Loma, California. She is married and a mother of four girls. She has attended Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) for the past ten years as a student, and eight years as a children's leader. Her husband also attends BSF and teaches as well. Their lives revolve around loving God and loving their neighbors, and for this reason they both teach others.

**Q**uiet time, a favorite time for the children's leaders at Bible Study Fellowship\* (BSF), is especially welcomed after a busy morning with the children. This is a time where the children and their leaders lay down for a ten minute period to reflect on the story that has been told to them, and also to learn to talk intimately with their creator. Each child is asked to have their hands, feet and body still so every person in the room can have an enjoyable quiet time with God. Talking to God becomes part of a child's lifestyle if it is taught and practiced in class or at home. So, on Wednesday mornings, I find myself with up to twelve 3-year-olds on the ground having quiet time with the Lord.

BSF teaches God's truths, His character and attributes, and how His word is applicable to daily living. As followers of Christ, we are admonished to renew our minds through the word, so that we may be transformed to the perfect will of God (Romans 13:2). BSF is a study that helps people to look at biblical views as absolute, dispelling world and humanistic ideals that rob humanity of their dignity and their rightful place before God.

I've recently become aware that society is changed and molded by ideas that are trickling down through pop music, movies and the arts, which are very present in our society today. Because pop culture has been so prevalent in the United States for more than 50 years, there has been a rapid decline in values that were closely adhered to in the late thirties and early forties. Moral values are now considered relative; of no consequence when it brings death to the unborn child, youth are permitted and expected to be promiscuous, and condoms are handed out at schools. God did not intend for His creation to have contrary ideas apart from His own, nor did He intend for His creation to wag their finger at Him for imposing His ideas upon humanity. He is the creator of all and has the right to impose such laws and ideas that bring understanding of purpose to His creation.

As a student of the Bible, I have spent countless hours answering questions, looking up verses, and reading, reading, reading. All this prepares me to teach, not only at BSF but also at my church where I teach children's Sunday church and Sunday school for junior high. I have become a teacher of God's word because I have been equipped to teach the word of God



\*Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) is a seven year course, with one of seven different studies taught each year. Each section teaches the Bible to men, women and children. It is an international Bible study that has successfully taught God's word for over fifty years to thousands of adults and children around the globe.

in a correct and true manner. The children at BSF come every Wednesday for thirty-two weeks. While their mothers are receiving their lesson, the children are instructed through Bible stories and hymns that have beautiful words giving glory to God. The morning also consists of various activities which the children enjoy as they learn to participate as a group. Flag and marching time includes saluting the flag. Snack time gives the children freedom to talk about themselves and their family. In rhythm time, we learn to use musical instruments and other items, such as scarves, to move with the music. At the end of the morning, we use a closing activity that keeps the children busy but quiet before their mothers come to pick them up.

My favorite time of the morning is story time. I have a passion for teaching God's word. The length and contents of the story will depend on the age of the children in the class. A semi-circle is the best way to sit all the children for teaching times, which include the story and hymn time; this way the teacher is able to see all their faces. During the first few weeks of the year, as the children are getting familiarized with the program, there will usually be one or two children who get wiggly and fidgety, not wanting to sit still for the lesson. This causes the others in the circle to want to follow their lead. Therefore, the child is taken out of the room and is helped to

evaluate his misbehavior and is reminded that the other children want to listen to the story without interruptions. When the child has realized his misconduct and is willing to return and listen to instruction, he is taken back to his assigned area. With loving discipline, the child learns that listening and obedience are required in order to participate. He also learns that respect for others is important when he is quiet and not bringing attention to himself. By the middle of the year, most 3-year-olds are able to sit for a 10 to 15 minute story and hymn time.

The BSF children's program is available to any child, with no cost to the parent. By the time a child has completed the program, he will take with him skills that will serve him for the rest of his life. He will know how to have quiet times alone with his God, and how to love the word of God. He will have learned listening skills that are important in school and in the work place. He will have learned obedience and respect for authority, and also how to respect and get along with his own peers. All this and much more will come about, because there had been an adult BSF leader who took the time to model the true spirit of Christ to him. This is what BSF has done for me as a student and as a teacher of God's word, and continues to do for thousands of adults and young children around the world today. ♦

**As followers of Christ, we are admonished to renew our minds through the word, so that we may be transformed to the perfect will of God (Romans 13:2).**

**I have become a teacher of God's word because I have been equipped to teach the word of God in a correct and true manner.**

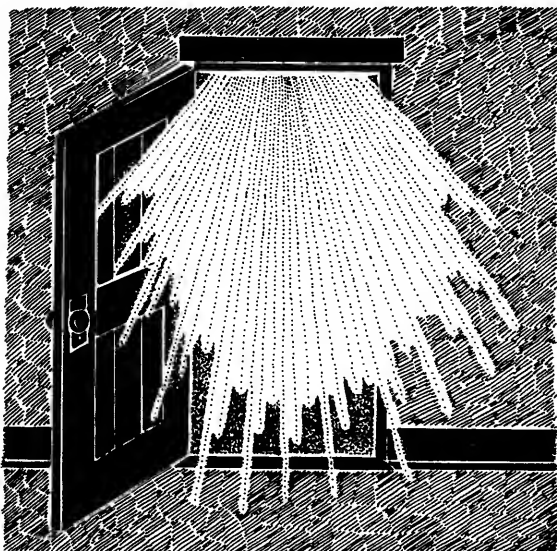
## Helping "at risk" children

**A**s a graduate of New York University, I was very excited to begin my work with "at risk" youth. I was eager to use my education and years of volunteer experience to improve the lives of youth. Upon relocation to southern California, I gained employment at a residential treatment facility for children in the foster care system. There, I wrote, developed and implemented three different programs that I believed would enhance the lives of the youth while they were at the facility and in the future. However, to my great dismay, I didn't see that the programs had a great impact.

Disappointed and on maternity leave, I had the opportunity to reevaluate how I would go forth in what I believed was my life's calling. After much reflection, I decided to become a teacher. My first teaching assignment came during a major transition within the school. This transition allowed me to modify the existing curriculum and integrate the use of drama and film into subject presentations. The change was well received by the students. The need for crisis intervention dropped drastically in my classroom. The students were thriving. However, as I looked into their eyes, something was still missing.

**by Nicole Crigler**

Nicole Crigler turned 33 years old in June. She considers this her resurrection year; she is experiencing wholeness more and more everyday. Nicole believes in angels; God sent her two in her children Sydney and David. Nicole is a member of First A.M.E. Church in Santa Monica, California.



**However, as I looked into their eyes, something was still missing. Something by law I was not able to give them. That something was an understanding of a love of God that heals broken hearts, shines light in the dark places and gives strength when you have none.**

Something by law I was not able to give them. That something was an understanding of a love of God that heals broken hearts, shines light in the dark places and gives strength when you have none. This is what I knew my students needed.

Although my husband and I were active in church, I didn't feel prepared to take on this task. I had so many questions. Teaching  $1 + 1 = 2$  is different than talking

about God. How could I integrate the concept of a loving God who wants to be in relationship with us into a public school curriculum? Is that even my responsibility? It is at this point in my career I recognized the importance of being a Christian educator.

Most of my students had little to no contact with their parents. Knowing this, I felt it was my responsibility, since they spent the majority of their days with me, to give them something greater than the skills of reading, writing, math and science. I had to give them more than the ability to think critically and apply what we learned in the world. I had to give them more than my love and respect. I had to give them, or rather show them, God.

Determined and inspired by this revelation and new direction, I returned to graduate school at the Claremont School of Theology. If I were going to be the effective educator that I desired to be, I knew this was the opportunity for such preparation.

Considered a liberal seminary, Claremont takes pride in its diversity. In my entering class, there were only seven African Americans, all of us women. One dropped out by the end of the first month. This was the largest group of African Americans the school admitted in years. The presence of African Americans was so sparse on the campus that the Pan African Seminarians Association was defunct due to the lack of students. Shocked by the issue of race at such a "liberal" institution, I realized instantly that this would be a challenging journey.

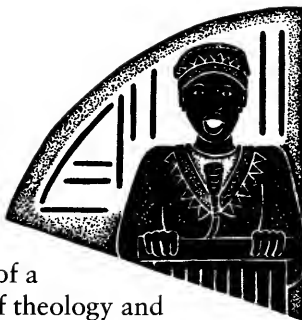
As a full time student, I took five courses my first semester. Returning to school from a seven-year hiatus, I felt overwhelmed. I had not been exposed to theological concepts and sat in every class with a dictionary. I received my first paper back applauding my writing skills but noting that I didn't understand the content of the texts. The professor was right, I didn't understand the world of a dead German man from the 1800's. But I had to try if I was going to graduate from the school and return to the classroom as the educator I desired to be. In becoming a student again, I would become a better educator.

So I continued reading, writing and asking questions and, eventually, I did understand. I integrated my love for the arts into my program and enhanced my skills in that area as well. But the most important lesson was that I strengthened my faith. Each class forced me to examine myself in some way and seek Christ for understanding. I read texts on the problem of evil and suffering and prayed earnestly for clarity. For I knew that these were the questions of my "at risk" population. The projects introduced me to texts that named concepts I already believed and applied to my life. The term "sacred worth" is now not only part of my vocabulary but my identity. This is the understanding of the self and others that I hope to convey to my students.

During this time, I also had another child and I realized that this process was also for my children. When my 5-year-old complains and doesn't want to go to school, I encourage her with words but also by example. She sees me push on, through exhaustion and frustration, to reach my goals. I see her do the same. She reads words over and over until she can read them with no trouble. My 18-month-old son opens his books now and speaks as he points to the words. He jumps right up every time he falls, still running forward.

I give praise to God constantly as I make it from one hurdle to the next. And really that is what the challenges are—just hurdles. The race will be over soon. I don't know what awaits me at the finish line but I see the faces of my children, my students, our children, cheering me on as I continue to run. ♦





# Women's teaching call

I am the chair of a department of theology and philosophy and an associate professor of theology at a Christian university. I have published a book; chapters in other books; and articles in journals, magazines, and an encyclopedia. The work I'm doing now is greatly influenced by my experiences as a graduate student in theology, specifically the model of teaching provided by my dissertation advisor, Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, who now directs the Women In Theology and Ministry Program at Emory University.

Women have always been significant mentors in my own educational journey. Shirley Sekarajasingham, with whom I studied French for four years in a public high school, taught and lived with such passion that I was inspired to become a teacher myself. When I double-majored in English and French, observing the way a young English professor balanced her active involvement in parenting two young children with her commitment to teaching convinced me that becoming a professor was the career path most compatible with my own desire to be a mother as well. Though I never gave it much thought at the time, I am certain that had it not been for the examples of a woman chairing the English department and a woman dean at the seminary I attended, I would not have found it so natural later to take my place as a woman administrator myself.

In the work I'm doing now, I find myself in a place generally less friendly to women's leadership than anywhere I've ever been before, even though prior to this I served as the solo pastor of a Mennonite and Brethren in Christ congregation (although Anabaptists have a long history of women in pastoral leadership dating back to the Radical Reformation, not all congregations and denominations are friendly to women in ministry). However, for just this reason, it is important for the young men and women I teach and advise to experience women pastors and educators. Not only do students benefit from whatever spiritual gifts women pastors and educators may have been given by God as

they exercise their vocation, but they also receive an informal education simply by seeing women working in these roles.

At the Christian university where I am currently employed, most students and employees are far more conservative than I. A link between the evangelical views and conservative political tendencies that most hold is assumed as natural in the university's particular brand of Christian culture. I have often wondered why God has called me to this place. When I started here, I had little teaching experience. Because I was both a pastor and a theologian, I was assigned to teach courses in practical theology (ministry). Not only were these classes outside my academic field of expertise, but certain administrators, colleagues, and students opposed having courses in pastoral ministry taught by a woman. Over time, as I eased out of ministry and into my own field of theology, the situation improved somewhat. However, the only way I have been able to make peace with being a woman theological educator at a conservative Christian university has been to understand it as a mission field. My role is not only to write, teach and administrate, but also, probably more important, just to be here.

As is true at most undergraduate private liberal arts colleges, about two-thirds of our students are women while a majority of our faculty is male. It is important for all of our students, regardless of gender, to see women teaching and chairing departments—especially in departments of religion, philosophy, theology, biblical studies, and ministry; in all of which women faculty are under-represented, especially at Christian institutions that can be even less supportive of women in these roles. Women major in our ministry department in proportion to the majority they comprise within our student body. The biblical studies chair, a woman, organizes monthly meetings of the women faculty with the women religion majors. Many of the students who attend these meetings express fears that their options for employment and marriage will be narrow to non-existent. Some encounter resistance to their voca-

by Heather Ann Ackley

Heather Ann Ackley, Ph.D., lives in La Verne, California. She is the divorced mother of Anna, 8, and worships at La Verne Church of the Brethren. She is chair of Theology and Philosophy and Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Azusa Pacific University. She is the author of *Women, Music and Faith in Central Appalachia* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).

**Not only do students benefit from whatever spiritual gifts women pastors and educators may have been given by God as they exercise their vocation, but they also receive an informal education simply by seeing women working in these roles.**





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tional goals in ministry, biblical studies, or theology from parents and pastors simply because they are women. Although male mentors are vital to women students, they cannot assuage these very real concerns in quite the same way as accomplished women professionals. Though otherwise

not necessarily the most liberating of biblical passages for women, Titus 2:1-8 emphasizes the importance of woman-to-woman religious instruction. Likewise, even the most conservative Christian institutions must recognize that as educators, Christian women have a unique call that only a woman can fulfill. ♦

### **Women in church leadership**

Miriam Martin has been licensed as a conference minister/administrator in the Atlantic Coast Conference, Mennonite Church USA.

Lois Johns Kauffman was ordained March 7, 2004, as pastor at Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana.

On February 15, 2004, Elizabeth Rauschenberger was licensed as Minister of Congregational Care at Zion Mennonite Church, Souderton, Pennsylvania.

Emma Frederick was licensed on February 8, 2004, for pastoral ministry at Deep Run Mennonite Church East in Perkasio, Pennsylvania.

Nancy Rodriguez-Lora was licensed at Roselawn Mennonite Church, Elkhart, Indiana, on March 21, 2004.

Ada Nofsinger was licensed as Minister of Visitation at Metamora Mennonite Church, Metamora, Illinois, in late 2003.

On October 5, 2003, Faith Evans was ordained at Washington Community Fellowship in Washington, D.C.

Jennifer Davis Sensenig is currently serving as interim pastor at Pasadena Mennonite Church, Pasadena, California.

Elaine Haines was licensed and installed on February 15, 2004, as co-pastor with her husband Joe at Harris Hill Mennonite Church, Williamsville, New York.

#### **WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT**

### **Looking Forward**

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2004  
Women pastors

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2004  
Young women's voices